

A Plan to Clean Up the Lower Willamette: It's Time You Engage

(512 words)

Some 15 years after it was placed on the EPA's Superfund list, cleanup of the Lower Willamette River is nearly in sight.

After a prolonged effort to determine what pollution exists where, what risk it poses, and how to best reduce those risks, the EPA has released its "Proposed Plan" for cleaning up just over 10 miles of the lower Willamette River – and the clock has started on a 60-day comment period that provides the opportunity for the people who live, work and play near the river to tell us what we got right and what needs improvement before the plan is finalized late this year, and the work begins in earnest.

Undoubtedly some will view the proposed cleanup as too expensive and overly aggressive, while others will surely criticize it for allowing some contaminated sediment to remain in the river. We've worked very hard to strike the right balance to ensure that the plan...it's achievable, affordable and protective.

At an estimate cost of \$900 million, the cleanup plan we're proposing is a big one, ranking among the largest river sediment cleanups in the nation.

Much of the cleanup we propose relies on removing contamination from the most polluted and toxic areas. Where that kind of removal is not practical, our plan calls for covering the pollution with a cap of clean sand or, in some locations, letting sediments that flow naturally through the area to cover the pollution.

As we developed our plan, we engaged and closely consulted with a coalition of public & private stakeholders, including the Governor, the Mayor of Portland, the Lower Willamette Group -- which includes many of the industry and government entities responsible for doing the actual cleanup work – six federally recognized tribes, members of Congress, and a multitude of other city, county, state and federal partner agencies.

It is no secret that legal and technical disagreements over the years delayed this process for far too long. But we're finally at a point where the public can see the scientific, engineering, public health and the economic considerations that we've

been grappling with for so long. At last, over the next 60 days, the public will have a chance to weigh-in with us about our plan.

This is a significant milestone for Portland. Whether you treasure the lower Willamette's spiritual, aesthetic, recreational or economic value, this is your river. Everyone with a stake in the river should pay attention to and engage in this regional conversation about cleanup over these next two months.

Over 50 years ago, it was clear to Governor Tom McCall that the Willamette -- the lifeblood of Portland -- needed to be protected for future generations. While the oft-hailed efforts to clean it up in the 60s and 70s ended many of the ongoing insults, a century of largely unfettered dumping of our sewage and industrial means a lot of pollution still remains. And so does Governor McCall's idea that the people who rely on the Willamette deserve a river that can support future generations.

We look forward to hearing from you.

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